

EXHIBIT 5

[DONATE](#)

POLITICS

Did the Trump camp help far-right militia groups plan the Jan. 6 attack?

June 30, 2022 · 1:38 PM ET

Heard on Fresh Air



Terry Gross

42-Minute Listen**PLAYLIST**[Download](#)[Transcript](#)

New York Times journalist Alan Feuer says some members of Trump's inner circle have close ties to the Proud Boys and the Oath Keepers, whose leaders have been charged with seditious conspiracy.

Sponsor Message**TERRY GROSS, HOST:**

This is FRESH AIR. I'm Terry Gross. Extremism and political violence is the beat my guest, Alan Feuer, covers for The New York Times. He's been reporting on the Justice Department's investigation into efforts to overturn the 2020 election, as well as doing some reporting on the House Select Committee's January 6 investigation. Over the past few years, Feuer has done extensive reporting on the Proud Boys, the far-right group that took the lead in confronting police, crossing police lines and breaching the Capitol on January 6.

He contributed to a remarkable New York Times video showing how they led the charge. The video is based on court documents, text messages, a video recording of a Proud Boys meeting to prepare for the 6 and videos recorded on the 6 from many sources, in which The Times was able to locate exactly where and when Proud Boys were during the attack. Five members of the group have been charged with seditious conspiracy. On Tuesday, after the House Select Committee heard testimony from Cassidy Hutchinson, who was an aide to Trump's final chief of staff, Mark Meadows, Feuer wrote about how this could lead the former president closer to federal criminal charges. We recorded our interview yesterday.

Alan Feuer, welcome to FRESH AIR. Busy time for you, huh? (Laughter).

ALAN FEUER: Indeed, it is. Thanks for having me, Terry.

GROSS: Oh, my pleasure. One of the things you flagged when you were writing live about the Hutchinson testimony for The New York Times was that Trump asked Meadows, Trump's final chief of staff, Mark Meadows, to contact Roger Stone and Mike Flynn on the night before January 6. And Cassidy Hutchinson doesn't know what was said but knows the conversation took place. Why do you think that is so important?

FEUER: Yeah. So the phone calls that Hutchinson describes between Meadows, Stone and Flynn are important, if unresolved, for this reason. While we don't know what Meadows may have said to Stone and Flynn, what we do know is that Stone and Flynn both have extensive contacts to far-right militia groups that were intimately involved in the attack on the Capitol. And I want to stress that those contacts are what they are, and we don't know if those contacts are - have any anything incriminating about them,

right? And we may find out more about them, and we may not. And that will come in the fullness of time.

But it is without dispute that in the run up to January 6, there were two pre-January 6 big pro-Trump rallies in Washington, and one was in November, and one was in December. And Stone and Flynn both played very active roles in speaking at those events and in pushing the big lie that there was fraud in the election and then, you know, taking part in, you know, kind of the support of Trump's overarching message that he should stay in power. And at those events, Stone and Flynn were often accompanied by members of the Proud Boys, the Oath Keepers and a third group which we will probably hear more about soon called the 1st Amendment Praetorian, who served as both kind of personal bodyguards for them and did event security for the larger rallies. On January 6 itself, Roger Stone was guarded by a contingent of Oath Keepers.

GROSS: They're a militia group. They're a far-right militia group.

FEUER: They are a far-right militia group and one of...

GROSS: And Mike Flynn is Trump's former national security adviser.

FEUER: Mike Flynn is definitely - and both - let's not forget, as the committee pointed out yesterday, both Flynn and Stone received presidential pardons from Donald Trump in the weeks leading up to January 6, right? So you have a situation where two very close advisers to the president receive pardons from Trump in the weeks leading up to January 6. They then proceed, throughout the post-election period, to appear, you know, as sort of, you know, keynote-ish-like speakers at a bunch of pro-Trump rallies where the lies about the election are being spread. They are guarded by members of far-right groups. And, for example, you know, some members of Roger Stone's Oath Keeper security detail on January 6 itself are part of the seditious conspiracy case that has been brought against the Oath Keepers. And interestingly, one of those three guys has pleaded guilty to seditious conspiracy and is cooperating with the government's investigation.

GROSS: Wow. OK. So if Mark Meadows at the time was Trump's chief of staff and Trump asked Meadows to contact Roger Stone and Mike Flynn the night before the insurrection, that kind of connects Trump to the planning for it? Is that what's being suggested here?

FEUER: Look; we don't know what conversation Meadows had with Stone and Flynn. It could - look; we have to leave open the possibility that, you know, it was, you know...

GROSS: Hi. How you doing? (Laughter).

FEUER: Hi. How you doing?

GROSS: Yeah.

FEUER: You know, you guys getting good service over there at the Willard Hotel, right? We have to leave that open. Nonetheless, it is a potential conduit in which Trump could be connected directly to these militia groups that, ultimately, were at the vanguard of the attack on the Capitol. We're going to hear more about this when the committee hearings resume in mid-July. Representative Jamie Raskin is going to lead another hearing that will specifically look at this question, the connections between, you know, Trump world, so to speak, and the militia groups on the ground that day. I'm not convinced yet that there is any smoking gun that the committee has found. I think that there is a lot of well-established and preexisting ties between Stone, Flynn and the militias and, of course, between Stone, Flynn and Trump, right? Those ties are kind of - if you know this world, they're there to be seen. The question is, were those ties used in a way to facilitate any criminal violence?

GROSS: And let's just bring up here that Mike Flynn, in a closed-door hearing with the January 6 House committee, was questioned by Lynne Cheney (ph), and she asked him if he believed in the peaceful transfer of power, and he took the Fifth.

FEUER: He also took the Fifth when he was asked if he felt that the violence that erupted at the Capitol was problematic legally and morally. And we should also point out that Roger Stone, in a similar fashion, took the Fifth multiple times during his own appearance in front of the House committee. So, you know, that is what it is. That is a closed box that we can't see into. And so, you know, what we do know is this - Roger

Stone, for example, has long-term and pretty profound connections to the Proud Boys. He is - has been a kind of friend and associate of the Proud Boys' former chairman Enrique Tarrio for a long time. Tarrio is now locked up on seditious conspiracy charges of his own.

When Stone went to Washington for the January 5, January 6 - you know, those two days, he brought with him a member of the Florida Proud Boys, you know, which is the same kind of - which is - you know, Tarrio himself is from Florida. So he was literally accompanied that whole time by a member of the Proud Boys. You know, his relationship to Tarrio, for example, is close enough that when you used to call Tarrio's cellphone and it clicked over to voicemail, it was Roger Stone who was on the voicemail saying, like, you've reached Enrique Tarrio's phone or whatever.

GROSS: Oh, really? (Laughter) Wow.

FEUER: Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah. They have long-term ties going back to when Stone himself was being prosecuted for his involvement in the Trump-Russia investigation. And he ultimately ended up threatening the federal judge in his case by putting on social media an image of the judge with, like, crosshairs over her face, right? The people who actually made that image for him were Enrique Tarrio and a group of Florida Proud Boys. They were doing Roger Stone's social media work. So they have this long-term - you know, it's like - he's very enmeshed in that group.

And then, of course, as we were just talking about, Stone on January 6th was being personally bodyguarded by a contingent of Oath Keepers. So what does that mean? I - you know, you tell me, Terry. I don't know what it means, but, you know, presumably, people are looking into this. And as I mentioned, one of the guys who was on his team, on his Oath Keeper team, has pleaded guilty to seditious conspiracy and is cooperating.

GROSS: So what does Stone have to say about this?

FEUER: Well, Stone adamantly denies that he had any role whatsoever in the violence that occurred at the Capitol on January 6th. And that has been his position more or less since Day 1. So, yeah, that's where he's coming from.

GROSS: Well, let's take a short break here because there's really a lot more to talk about. So let me reintroduce you. If you're just joining us, my guest is Alan Feuer, who has been reporting on extremism and political violence for The New York Times and reporting on the Justice Department investigation into attempts to overturn the 2020 election. He's also done extensive reporting on the Proud Boys. We'll be right back. This is FRESH AIR.

(SOUNDBITE OF YO LA TENGO'S "HOW SOME JELLYFISH ARE BORN")

GROSS: This is FRESH AIR. Let's get back to the interview I recorded yesterday with Alan Feuer, who's been reporting on extremism and political violence for The New York Times. He's been covering the Justice Department investigation into attempts to overturn the 2020 election as well as doing some reporting on the January 6th committee, the House committee investigating the attack on the Capitol. And he's been writing extensively over the years about the Proud Boys.

The Justice Department has been very careful and not talking about what it's doing exactly. So a lot of people are wondering what, if anything, will these Justice Department investigations lead to? So where are we, to your knowledge, in the Justice Department's investigations? Like, what are the paths that you know of that it's pursuing now?

FEUER: So the most obvious and sort of least newsworthy path is, of course, the fact that 840-plus criminal cases have been filed against people who were physically involved in the storming of the Capitol, right? Let's set that aside 'cause I think everybody knows about that.

What the Justice Department is also pursuing is a investigation into whether crimes were committed by people who put their names to these slates of, you know, fake pro-Trump electors in states that Joe Biden actually won. Those people are mostly, like, state-level Republican officials in Arizona and Pennsylvania and Michigan and Georgia and other key swing states that were the fulcrum of the election, right? And these people got together, and they kind of did this thing that had never been done before and said, hey, Biden won the state, but we are going to create this other, you know,

document that says that Trump won the state. And we're going to use that, and we're going to send it up to Mike Pence for use on January 6th.

So this wing of the election starts with those people, and it looks ultimately towards the people who kind of devised and implemented that plan, who are lawyers close to Donald Trump. And so we've seen subpoenas that have gone out from this grand jury that's investigating the fake elector angle. And sort of - right there in the subpoenas are names like Rudy Giuliani, John Eastman and sort of lesser-known names like Jenna Ellis, Boris Epshteyn and them. But they're mostly a bunch of lawyers who kind of put all this together. There is also a grand jury investigation that is looking into people who organized, spoke at, provided security for Trump's event at the Ellipse on January 6th.

GROSS: Is that the seditious conspiracy angle?

FEUER: Well, the seditious conspiracy charges are already lodged, right? They're lodged against the Proud Boys. They're lodged against the Oath Keepers. The question is, what is the connection between the militia groups that have been charged with sedition and the political organizers with whom those groups worked multiple times in the post-election period? And what is their connection, if any, to folks inside the White House?

And that - I suppose if you're asking about the political organizer bucket and - is that the seditious conspiracy investigation? I would say, yeah, kind of, because the Proud Boys and the Oath Keepers figure into that broader investigation, right? That doesn't mean that there will be seditious conspiracy charges brought against anyone else. But that is all part of the same kind of large universe of characters, if that makes any sense. And this thing is like multitentacled, and it's like an octopus's, you know, arms all wrapped around each other. It's very complicated. It's very overlapping. And it's very hard to sort through.

And I should say, there's one extra thing that just happened last week that we're still trying to figure out, which is that some lawyers who were involved in this, namely John Eastman and a former Justice Department official named Jeff Clark, had their phones seized by the Justice Department. And, you know, it's not entirely clear which

lane of the investigation that feeds into. But we do know that it is part of the broader January 6 effort by DOJ.

GROSS: Let's talk about your writing about the Proud Boys. And the Proud Boys are the far-right, pro-Trump group known for starting fights and inciting violence. Five of them are facing charges of seditious conspiracy. And so why have you been keeping your eye on them?

FEUER: In short, because I've been following them since they, essentially, were created in 2016. I've been writing about them, you know, on and off for, you know, what is now, you know, more than half a decade. And so when it became clear that they were at the forefront of what happened at the Capitol, I just sort of inevitably became involved in the criminal cases that started getting filed, you know, in connection with January 6.

GROSS: So the Proud Boys played a key role in the attack on the Capitol. They were there in five different locations, igniting the group that stormed the police lines and tried and succeeded into breaking into the Capitol. And so before we get to the details of how they managed to do that, let's talk about a video call that was leaked to The New York Times. And I don't know if it was leaked to you personally. This is a call of a meeting held by Enrique Tarrio, the leader of the Proud Boys, a week before January 6. And he and some top lieutenants held a video conference with a handpicked crew and started a new special chapter called the ministry of self-defense. What was it?

FEUER: The ministry of self-defense was, as you described, was a handpicked crew of what I'll call elite members of the Proud Boys who were chosen by Tarrio and his top leaders for what one of them described as their throttle control. The idea was this - there was a pro-Trump rally in Washington on December 12, 2020. It got very violent in its aftermath. There were street fights after nightfall. Some members of the Proud Boys got stabbed. This took place around the time when Tarrio and a group of his members vandalized a historic Black church and stripped down a Black Lives Matter banner from the facade and burned it in the street. So that event was kind of a disaster all around.

And, you know, if you take Tarrío's description of the ministry of self-defense at face value - and we can talk about whether we should do that or not - that group was chosen so as to avoid the chaos and sort of, you know, lack of discipline and order that took place in December when the Proud Boys returned to Washington on January 6. And so they put together not only, you know, a kind of group of trusted members, but they organized them in this kind of hierarchical structure and 10-man teams. And they imposed a bunch of, you know, rules of order, you know, no drinking, you know? Adopt a defensive posture. Stay away from so-called normie protesters, meaning just, like, normal sort of pro-Trump supporters, you know? And, you know, kind of obey police lines on the ground on January 6. What's fascinating about this meeting, which goes almost 2 hours, is that virtually none of what Tarrío was suggesting actually happened on the ground on January...

GROSS: The opposite.

FEUER: The opposite happened. So what's the difference here, right? What's going on? And that's just sort of an open question.

GROSS: Well, one difference is that Tarrío couldn't be in Washington on January 6 because shortly before that, he was arrested - right? - for carrying two high-capacity rifle magazines.

FEUER: He was arrested directly in connection with the banner burning at the church that I described, right? And then, when he was being prosecuted - when he was arrested, he was coming off the plane. It's January 4, two days for January 6. He's flying into D.C. He's coming off the plane. He's essentially told that he's going to be arrested. He gets off the plane. He's arrested. They charge him with the banner burning. They process him, lo and behold, he's carrying two high-capacity rifle magazines imprinted with the Proud Boys, you know, like, rooster logo. I don't know if you can picture it, but whatever. And that's what takes him off the table for January 6 because as part of his release conditions by the judge, he is ordered to leave Washington, D.C. and not come back.

GROSS: If you're just joining us, my guest is Alan Feuer. He's a reporter for The New York Times who's been covering the Justice Department investigation into the

attempts to overturn the results of the 2020 election. We'll be right back after a short break. I'm Terry Gross. And this is FRESH AIR.

(SOUNDBITE OF SO PERCUSSION AND STEVE REICH'S "STEVE REICH: MALLET QUARTET III FAST")

GROSS: This is FRESH AIR. I am Terry Gross. Let's get back to the interview I recorded yesterday with Alan Feuer, who covers extremism and political violence for The New York Times. He's been reporting on the Justice Department's investigation into January 6th and attempts to overturn the election. He's also written extensively about the Proud Boys, the far-right extremist group that took the lead January 6th in confronting police, crossing police lines, removing barriers and breaching the Capitol. Five of the Proud Boys are charged with seditious conspiracy including the group's leader, Enrique Tarrio. But he was arrested when he arrived in Washington on January 4th. So on the 6th, he wasn't able to be with the Proud Boys at the Capitol.

All right. So the person who takes over for him on January 6th as the leader of the group is Joe Biggs. Just tell us a little bit about Joe Biggs.

FEUER: So it's sort of Biggs and another guy. But sure, Joe Biggs ends up kind of having what I'll call tactical control on the ground. Biggs is a former soldier, former Army sergeant, who saw combat overseas in Iraq and Afghanistan. He then transitions into a kind of interesting role in right-wing media. He ends up befriending Alex Jones, the conspiratorial-minded impresario of Infowars, and becomes an Infowars correspondent and goes all over the - you know, the world sort of doing right wing-affiliated reporting for Alex Jones.

He ultimately ends up joining the Proud Boys sort of, like, around 2018, and he becomes very close to Tarrio. They both live in Florida at the time. And Biggs and Tarrio start doing a bunch of what they do, these provocative street rallies that often end in brawls, many of them out West in liberal bastions like Portland. And, you know, Biggs is involved in the Proud Boys all throughout the very hot summer of 2020 when the Proud Boys are fighting with Black Lives Matter activists in the street who were coming out after the murder of George Floyd in Minneapolis. And that's a sort of like,

you know, like - it's the most recent sort of upsurge of, well, preelection that the Proud Boys were involved in.

GROSS: So in a video before January 6th, Biggs says, this time we're not going to be wearing the colors you're used to seeing us in - 'cause they basically wore - was it orange? And what was the other color?

FEUER: It's black and yellow.

GROSS: Black and yellow, yeah. They basically used to wear black and yellow, you know, identifying themselves as Proud Boys. But this time, he says, they're not going to do that. He says, this time, myself and other leadership decided we're going to go incognito. We're going to be blending in like an old lady with some pins in her hand making a sweater. You won't know who's standing beside you. It could be Antifa. It could be me. What's the significance of that?

FEUER: The significance on the ground - right? In other words, the result of it is that it was impossible to know in the melee that took place at the Capitol who was a Proud Boy and who was not. And so when we all looked at this video of the day in real time, we didn't know at first how many Proud Boys were involved in key advances and breaches at the building because there was no way to know who they were. And so what the passage of time and the grueling labor of dozens, if not hundreds, of volunteer, open-source intelligence researchers has shown us is that there were way more Proud Boys in the crowd operating on the ground in tactical fashion than we originally knew.

And I want to stress here for a sec that the work, the grueling, painstaking, detailed work of finding these people in the videos of that day is an astonishing accomplishment because there is no single, you know, like, catchall basin for these videos. Don't forget, January 6th is this massive, digital crime scene that was documented by people with their own cameras that they put online. It was documented by, you know, like, news media cameras that was broadcast on TV. There was CCTV footage from the Capitol security cameras. There was body-worn cameras on the police that day. And slowly, all of this visual evidence has kind of seeped into the public. And there are people out there who did nothing for months but look

through clip after clip after clip and angle after angle after angle, identifying Proud Boys in the crowd.

GROSS: And this was work that was done for a really remarkable New York Times video that you were part of analyzing and putting together, that connects text messages, court documents and the videos that you were just describing so that you can see exactly where the Proud Boys were during all the breaches of the Capitol. And you could see that they took a leading role. Joe Biggs is suspected of starting the first breach of police lines at the Capitol. And this was about 15 minutes before Congress was set to start certifying the results of the election. How did he set it off, according to your knowledge?

FEUER: As you said, there is a crowd gathered outside the most exterior barricades of the Capitol grounds just before Congress is about to go into joint session. And at some point, a guy comes up to Biggs who has no clear-cut connection to the Proud Boys. There is video of Biggs having some sort of exchange with this guy, puts his arm around - you know, they put their arms around each other. You could see them talking. You don't - we don't know - we don't have video or audio of what was said.

But what we do know is that immediately after speaking to Joe Biggs, this guy - his name is Ryan Samsel. He's a barber from Pennsylvania. He walks alone - separates himself from the crowd and walks directly up to the barricades behind which there's a small group of cops. He starts to kind of rattle the barricade and agitate and sort of confront the police at that barricade. Within seconds, others join him at the barricade. And within minutes after that, that barricade falls. And that is essentially the tipping point of the entire riot that day.

Now, when Ryan Samsel gets arrested, he tells the FBI what happened that day. And he says that Joe Biggs, in their conversation, encouraged him to go up and agitate and confront the cops. And, you know, he kind of demurred and said he hesitated. He said he didn't want to do it. And he claims that Biggs flashed a gun at him - like, you know - like, kind of flashed a gun from his waist, questioned his manhood and said, go do it. And so he did. Now, Joe Biggs, let's be clear, entirely denies that account. Joe Biggs has not been charged with having a gun. Nonetheless, that is the story that Samsel himself has provided the FBI with how this all kind of kicked off.

GROSS: So once the barricades are breached, what do the Proud Boys do next? They move to another location - right? - and start instigating there.

FEUER: Yeah. So what ultimately happens is a series of complicated, I will call tactical, maneuvers by the Proud Boys that day. And each one, it - you can kind of see a pattern of behavior in the visual evidence. They locate a kind of key, sensitive point at the Capitol. They kind of instigate other rioters around them who may - who aren't necessarily affiliated with the Proud Boys at all to kind of get everybody upset and encouraged. They kind of - they oftentimes sort of take part in, you know, instigating violence against the police. And then they let the crowd do its thing. They almost step back once the crowd has been excited and they - you know, the crowd moves through. And they kind of do the same thing again and again.

GROSS: By constantly moving, inciting the crowd to violence and then, like, moving to another location, do you think the Proud Boys were trying to become more invisible? I mean, remember, like, they're not wearing their colors, so they're not easily identified. Once the police lines are breached, they often, like, move away and go to another location. So it's kind of like wiping away their fingerprints.

FEUER: So, look, if you talk to the Proud Boys' lawyers, they will adamantly deny that there was a preplanned conspiracy to storm the building, to do any of this stuff, that - you know, like, there's no - they'll say there's really no smoking gun evidence. There's no text from, you know, Tarrio to Biggs or from Tarrio to others or Biggs - that says, here's the plan - right? - ABC. That said, the visual evidence is what it is, and you can see them using these tactics again and again that day. And whether it was purposeful or whether they were just making it up in the minute, you know, you are right in that what they are doing on the ground is pushing other people forward, allowing the chaos and violence to accelerate. And then they themselves recede and move on.

GROSS: Let's take a short break here. If you're just joining us, my guest is Alan Feuer, who's been reporting on the Justice Department investigation into attempts to overturn the 2020 election, as well as reporting extensively on the Proud Boys. We'll be right back. This is FRESH AIR.

(SOUNDBITE OF JOAN JEANRENAUD'S "AXIS")

GROSS: This is FRESH AIR. Let's get back to the interview I recorded yesterday with Alan Feuer, who's been reporting on the Justice Department investigation into attempts to overturn the 2020 election. And he's been reporting over the years extensively on the Proud Boys, including their role in the insurrection on January 6.

So now that five members of the Proud Boys, including the leader, Enrique Tarrio, are charged with seditious conspiracy, what are the Proud Boys up to?

FEUER: So in the immediate aftermath of January 6, as the Justice Department was rounding up members across the country, there are now - almost 50 members of the Proud Boys have been charged that we know of publicly. The group went into a tailspin of panic and paranoia, right? Everybody thought that the other guy was working with the FBI and that there was this kind of, like, you know - like, snitch mania went through the Proud Boys. What they ultimately ended up doing was sort of taking a step back from marquee, big-picture, public rallies, the stuff that they had been doing essentially since the beginning of the Trump administration. And they started to home in on local issues. So members of Proud Boys chapters in Wisconsin and Michigan and in small-town Ohio started showing up at school board meetings where hot-button issues like the teaching of anti-racist curricula were being discussed.

You know, more recently, Proud Boys have started showing up at drag queen shows at libraries because that is the new hot-button culture war issue. And they are at the forefront of that on the ground. At the same time, the Proud Boys have mounted a concerted, purposeful effort to run for local political offices. And the best example of that has been going on in Miami, Fla., which is Enrique Tarrio's hometown.

Over the past several months, the Proud Boys have managed to gain a small but significant foothold on the executive committee, essentially the steering committee of the Miami-Dade County Republican Party organization. So these are the people who set policy for the local Republican Party in Miami-Dade. And, you know, it's really remarkable the extent to which they have been able to kind of lay hold to the levers of mainstream political power. And that's a purposeful thing. Tarrio, before his arrest, had spoken about wanting to run for office himself. I think he already had run for office, at least tried to at one point.

GROSS: So I want to talk with you a little bit about the origins of the Proud Boys because it dates back to Gavin McInnes, who was one of the founders of Vice. And his intention was a kind of, like, rude, like, male-only, you know, macho, we love to fight and drink and make crude jokes men's club. Tell us about what his original intent was.

FEUER: Well, it's an interesting question about what his intent was, of course. He set this up...

GROSS: Well, I guess you can't answer that, but yeah.

FEUER: Well, no, no. But I just want to - but it's to the point here, right? It's to the point because he sets it up as, you know, a so-called drinking club. We're like the Elks or the Shriners. We're just guys looking for some guy time. He had a podcast, you know, at that point. And he would, you know, invite, like, his buddies over the podcast. They'd start drinking. They'd take over a bar. And it was all kind of codified around this sort of male, macho culture, right? But, you know, the notion that the Proud Boys were ever just a drinking club, it kind of obscured something that was a little different and a little darker. That's what I'm talking about, like, the intent thing.

And what I'm talking about is the Proud Boys had, from the beginning, styled themselves as what McInnes liked to call Western chauvinists, right? And, essentially, what that meant to the group was that, you know, it was a way to fight back against a perceived belief on the left that Western culture was inherently racist and sexist. And it was a way to suggest that - you know, that manly men have nothing to be ashamed of, that, you know, Western culture, which is, of course, by McInnes' own description, mostly white culture, should have no kind of racial guilt for its position of hegemony. And it kind of mixed these quasi-white nationalist notions in a friendly, digestible package that disavowed overt white nationalism but allowed for this kind of band of brotherhood based on male grievance and sort of, you know, resentful anger toward the left.

GROSS: Yeah, and people of color and women (laughter), resentment toward them.

FEUER: Yeah. Well, what's interesting is that - I would say this, the overt misogyny of the Proud Boys was always there from the beginning. The Proud Boys have always

allowed in members of any race. I remember being at a bar with a group of Proud Boys after a rally in June, 2017. And you did see a, you know, mostly white crowd. But there were absolutely have been and - there always have been members of minorities who, for whatever reason, joined the group. In fact, Enrique Tarrio, who took over the leadership from McInnes, is himself of Afro-Cuban descent. And so that is an interesting - I think, you know, that McInnes, who is a shrewd media operator, very savvy in that area, has always played the line between kind of overt, you know, expressions of white nationalism and, you know, a more palatable version that allows for a kind of plausible deniability.

GROSS: Well, let's take a short break here. If you're just joining us, my guest is Alan Feuer, a reporter for The New York Times who's been covering the Justice Department's investigation into attempts to overturn the election. And he's also reported extensively on the Proud Boys, including their role in the attack on the Capitol. We'll be right back. This is FRESH AIR.

(SOUNDBITE OF JAY-Z AND BEYONCE SONG, "'03 BONNIE AND CLYDE")

GROSS: This is FRESH AIR. Let's get back to the interview I recorded yesterday with Alan Feuer, who's been reporting on extremism and political violence for The New York Times. He's been covering the Justice Department investigation into attempts to overturn the 2020 election, as well as doing some reporting on the January 6 House committee investigating the attack on the Capitol. And he's written extensively about the Proud Boys and their role in the January 6 attack.

So the Proud Boys were never meant to be, like, an intellectual club. When McInnes started it, he said, we're bringing back hedonism, stupidity, ugliness. We're getting rid of taboos. We're getting armed. And we're having fun. And I hope you'll join us. So that says something right there - especially, we're getting armed.

FEUER: The Proud Boys have always celebrated violence. You know, I remember the first time I met Gavin McInnes. He complained to me that the true violent people were the leftist activists - right? - antifa. And I remember saying to him, OK, well, if that's the case, you know, if you find yourself confronting a violent antifa mob, you as a rugged Proud Boy and your manly men Proud Boys, why don't you just take a page out

of the civil rights playbook and walk into the teeth of the antifa mob and let them beat you guys up on camera, and then everybody will see sort of, you know, who celebrates violence and who doesn't? And his answer to me was very telling. He's like, there's no way we would do that because we just like to fight.

GROSS: (Laughter).

FEUER: So they've always celebrated violence.

GROSS: Yeah, yeah. And this is crazy. You write, as a character-building exercise, the Proud Boys forbid masturbation and pornography and that the group's initiation rituals - and this is early on, you know, during the McInnes era, the group's initiation rituals included reciting the names of five breakfast cereals while being slugged by other Proud Boys members (laughter). Like, that sounds crazy.

FEUER: Well, see; but I think - I mean, first of all, yes, it is crazy. But the way you just laughed at it, because it is laughable, is kind of the McInnes mindset that if we can make part of this jokey and stupid and pranky...

GROSS: Right, yes.

FEUER: ...And like a frat, it deflates the seriousness of it.

GROSS: And I fell right into that, didn't I? I just laughed. Yeah.

FEUER: Well, I mean, whatever. But you're right - because it is silly, and it is goofy. But I have the sense that that was purposeful.

GROSS: That's a whole thing on the far right now is, like, putting everything into italics so it's kind of ambiguous. It's like, into scare quotes, saying, oh, that was meant to be a joke. I was being ironic. Yeah.

FEUER: Yeah, it's a little safety valve that McInnes has opened and closed very shrewdly over the years.

GROSS: So, you know, weapons were not only conspicuous on January 6; weapons seem to be entering politics in a new way, especially through several ads by

Republicans in the primaries that show the Republicans, you know, the candidate, with a weapon. And the most extreme of these is a recent ad by Eric Greitens. And you actually wrote about this recently. Tell us about the ad for people who haven't seen it.

FEUER: Sure. So Greitens is running for the Senate in Missouri, and the ad essentially shows him standing with a shotgun outside a home, flanked by what looks like a military assault team dressed in full body armor, carrying AR-15-style weapons. And Greitens essentially says - he cocks - he racks the shotgun and says, we're going RINO hunting. You know, like, no limit, no - you know, bag and tag them. Here we go. And you see these armed and body-armored soldiers, SWAT team style, kick the door down and in they go.

And like you said, Terry, it's really kind of the most exaggerated use of weapons as an expression of political language that's come out in a season where Republican candidates have leaned very heavily on the use of firearms to codify a kind of devotion to anything from kind of, you know, manliness to traditional values, that the gun represents something sort of fundamental to the Republican vision of politics. And so Greitens' ad was just like - just took it to the next level. But his was clearly not the only one to do that.

GROSS: Alan Feuer, it's really been great to talk with you. Thank you so much for explaining so many things.

FEUER: Well, thanks for having me, Terry. I really appreciate it.

GROSS: Alan Feuer is a New York Times reporter covering extremism and political violence. He's been reporting on the Justice Department's investigation into attempts to overturn the 2020 election.

If you'd like to catch up on FRESH AIR interviews you missed - like this week's interviews with Mat Johnson, whose new novel is a futuristic, dystopian parable about partisan politics; or Joel Kim Booster, the writer and star of the gay rom-com "Fire Island"; or John Vercher, whose new novel is about a biracial mixed martial arts fighter battling the effects of brain trauma while trying to revive his career - check out

our podcast. You'll find lots of FRESH AIR interviews. And don't forget about our new newsletter, which you can subscribe to via our website at freshair.npr.org.

(SOUNDBITE OF MILES DAVIS' "FLORENCE SUR LES CHAMPS-ELYSEES")

GROSS: FRESH AIR's executive producer is Danny Miller. Our technical director and engineer is Audrey Bentham. Our interviews and reviews are produced and edited by Amy Salit, Phyllis Myers, Roberta Shorrock, Sam Briger, Lauren Krenzel, Heidi Saman, Ann Marie Baldonado, Thea Chaloner, Seth Kelley, Susan Nyakundi and Joel Wolfram. Our digital media producer is Molly Seavy-Nesper. Therese Madden directed today's show. I'm Terry Gross.

(SOUNDBITE OF MILES DAVIS' "FLORENCE SUR LES CHAMPS-ELYSEES")

Copyright © 2022 NPR. All rights reserved. Visit our website terms of use and permissions pages at www.npr.org for further information.

NPR transcripts are created on a rush deadline by an NPR contractor. This text may not be in its final form and may be updated or revised in the future. Accuracy and availability may vary. The authoritative record of NPR's programming is the audio record.



Get political news and analyses that matter

The NPR Politics newsletter explains the big news coming out of Washington.

SUBSCRIBE

[See more subscription options](#)

By subscribing, you acknowledge and agree to NPR's [Terms of Use](#) and [Privacy Policy](#).
NPR may share your name and email address with your NPR station. [See Details](#).

More Stories From NPR



POLITICS

President Biden posts 'blockbuster' three-month fundraising total: \$72 million



POLITICS

House passes defense bill mostly along party lines with culture war measures attached



ELECTIONS

Evangelical Christian voters in Iowa love Trump. Can another Republican win them over?



ELECTIONS

Rural voters lean red, young voters lean blue. So what's a young, rural voter to do?



POLITICS

RFK Jr. is building a presidential campaign around conspiracy theories



NATIONAL SECURITY

Microsoft says Chinese hackers breached email, including U.S. government agencies

Popular on NPR.org



ANIMALS

A record-breaking Burmese python — as long as a giraffe is tall — caught in Florida



EDUCATION

Student loan forgiveness is on the way for more than 800,000 borrowers



WORLD

78 pilot whales were slaughtered near a cruise ship carrying marine conservationists



RELIGION

Megachurches are getting even bigger as churches close across the country



FOOD

Famous Chocolate Wafers are no more, but the icebox cake lives on



EDUCATION

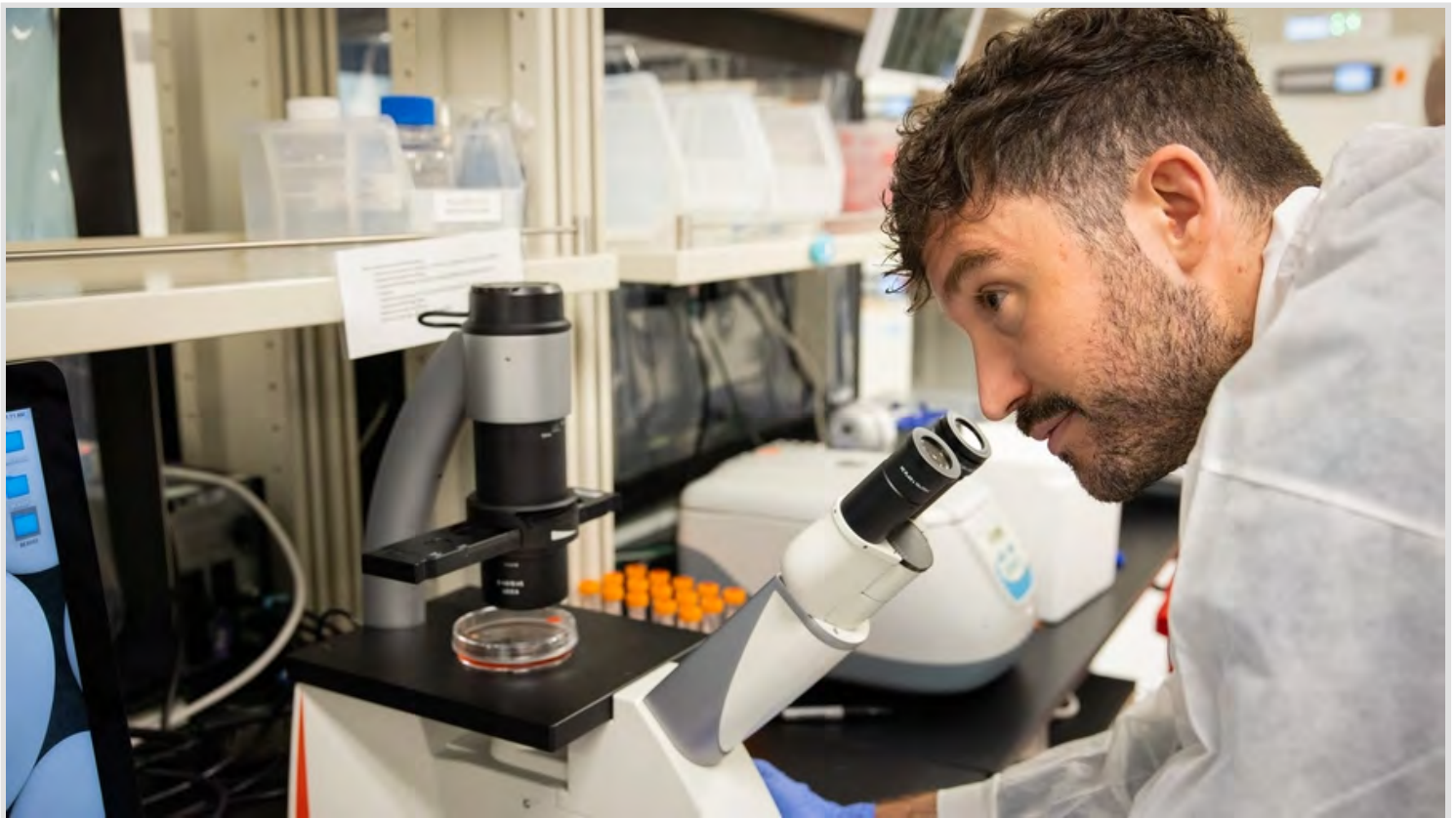
You could still be eligible for student loan forgiveness under this plan

NPR Editors' Picks



WORLD

She saved the diary of a Ukrainian writer killed by Russia. Then she was killed, too



HEALTH

Startup aims to make lab-grown human eggs, transforming options for creating families



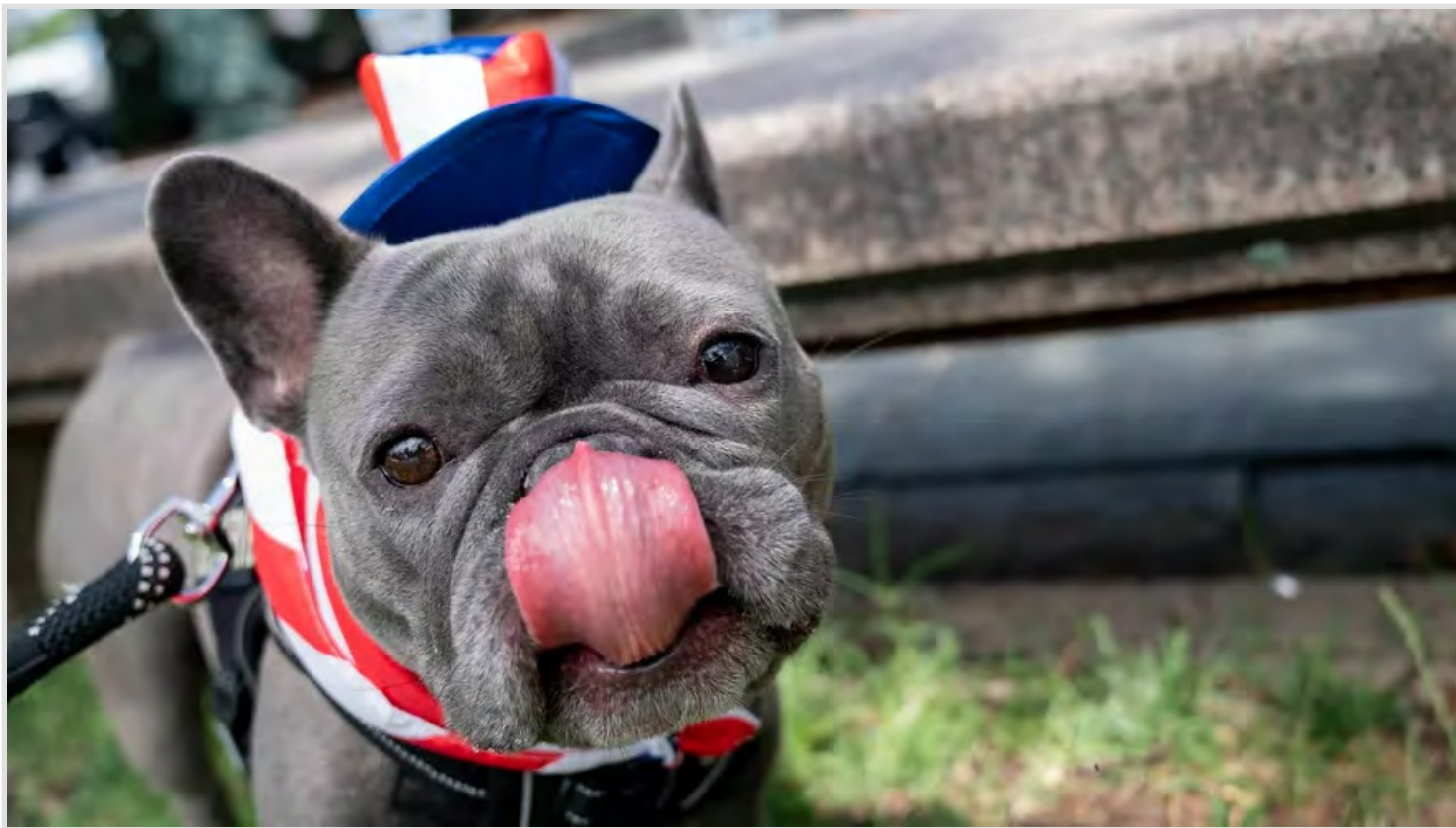
PHOTOGRAPHY

Oh dear: Photos show what humans have done to the planet




LIFE KIT

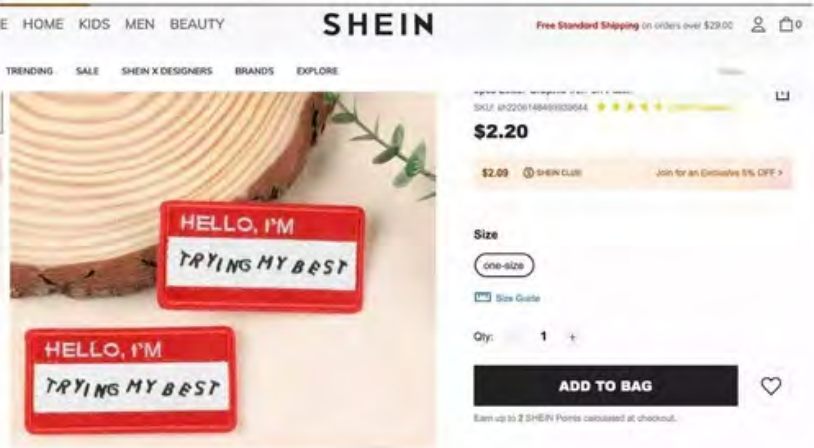
The do's and don'ts of being a plus-one



ANIMALS

5 tips to keep your pet safe — and comfortable — in extreme heat





BUSINESS

Shein steals artists' designs, a federal racketeering lawsuit says

READ & LISTEN

CONNECT

Home

News

Culture

Music

Podcasts & Shows

Newsletters

Facebook

Instagram

Press

Public Editor

Corrections

Contact & Help

ABOUT NPR

Overview

Diversity

NPR Network

Accessibility

Ethics

Finances

GET INVOLVED

Support Public Radio

Sponsor NPR

NPR Careers

NPR Shop

NPR Events

NPR Extra

[terms of use](#)

[privacy](#)

[your privacy choices](#)

[text only](#)

© 2023 npr